



CITY OF DURHAM | DURHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA



Date: February 4, 2015

To: Members of the Joint City-County Planning Committee

From: Hannah Jacobson, AICP, Planner

Through: Steven L. Medlin, AICP, Planning Director

Subject: Compact Neighborhood Planning Overview

Summary. The Durham City-County Planning Department is proposing a re-evaluation of the Future Land Use Map to better align Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries with the proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) system. The intention of this memo is to introduce the project scope, outline an approach to define boundaries, share initial results of staff analysis, and discuss next steps for public engagement.

Recommendation. This item is for informational purposes. No action is necessary at this time.

Background. Planning for the D-O LRT system has been ongoing for many years. In addition to serving transportation needs, the D-O LRT has the potential to redirect growth and focus development in a more compact, walkable and mixed-use pattern. To do so effectively, however, will require a multi-faceted approach to station area planning that includes land use planning, infrastructure improvements, and strategies to meet affordable housing objectives (Attachment 1, Station Area Planning Framework). This memo will describe the Land Use Planning initiative to re-examine Compact Neighborhood Tiers.

The 2005 *Durham Comprehensive Plan* divided the County into “development tiers” to describe the character of development and provide the basis for context-sensitive policy and regulation. The development tiers allow for a diversity of development patterns throughout Durham, ranging from low-intensity rural landscapes to a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use downtown.

The Compact Neighborhood Tier was created to promote “high density and intensity infill, redevelopment, and new development that integrates a mix of uses through an urban fabric,” and was applied on the Future Land Use Map to areas surrounding a proposed Durham-to-Raleigh regional rail transit system (Policy 2.1.2e, Compact Neighborhood Tier Defined). An additional “overlay” tier, called the Suburban Transit Area, was designated for later phases of the regional rail system, and provided the option of developing under Compact Neighborhood standards.

Triangle Transit is currently engaged in the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process to compete for federal funding for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit System – a 17-mile corridor connecting East Durham to UNC-Chapel Hill Hospitals. Preliminary engineering and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is underway.

With increased certainty of station locations, the Durham-City County Planning Department is proposing to re-evaluate the Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries established in the 2005 *Durham Comprehensive Plan* to better reflect the current light rail proposal. Since 2005, the light rail alignment has shifted and stations have been relocated, added and removed. This proposed re-evaluation will likely result in four-part changes to the Future Land Use Map, including:

1. Revising Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries;
2. Converting Suburban Transit Areas along the D-O LRT corridor to Compact Neighborhoods and revising their boundaries;
3. Amending the underlying future land use designations in the Compact Neighborhoods to Design District; and
4. Removing the Suburban Transit Areas not along the D-O LRT corridor.

Changing the development tier and the future land use designation does not impact the current zoning in these areas. It does, however, establish a the policy that *if* a rezoning is requested, then staff would only be supportive of a request to rezone to the Compact Design (CD) district, which was created and adopted to support transit-oriented development around the proposed rail transit stations. Once the Compact Neighborhood boundaries are defined, Staff expects to revisit areas to apply Compact Design zoning.

Attachment 2 highlights areas under consideration in this study. The intention of this memo is to introduce the project background, outline an approach to define boundaries, share the scope of the plan amendment analysis, and discuss next steps for public participation.

- I. **Draft Boundary Criteria and Application.** Staff has developed a list of criteria, or general rules, to follow in determining draft boundaries for the Compact Neighborhood Tiers. Establishing criteria and applying them uniformly across each LRT station area helps create a consistent foundation from which to begin conversations with the community. Below are criteria considered in the reassessment of Compact Neighborhood boundaries:

- a. Preserve significant environmental features;
- b. Use large rights-of-way (highways, railroad corridors, etc.) that preclude pedestrian connections as edges;
- c. Consider significant changes in the type and character of development (evidenced by different building scales, uses, etc.) as possible edges;
- d. Preserve intact single-family residential (especially in historic districts);
- e. Avoid self-contained University-College development;

- f. Consider the half-mile walking route (not just half-mile direct);
- g. Locate boundaries mid-block to maintain similar character on both sides of a street;
- h. Include large undeveloped or underutilized tracts of land;
- i. Include areas with particularly good access, visibility or prominence.

Through a combination of field work and GIS mapping, staff has applied the criteria to each of the LRT station areas under consideration to create draft boundary maps. It is worth reiterating that these boundaries are *preliminary* and are subject to change based on further analysis and discussions with the community and elected officials.

II. Study Scope. Typical plan amendments are evaluated against the criteria outlined in paragraph 3.4.7 of the Unified Development Ordinance:

- a. Whether the proposed change would be consistent with the intent, goals, objectives, policies, guiding principles and programs of any adopted plans;
- b. Whether the proposed change would be compatible with the existing land use pattern and/or designated future land uses;
- c. Whether the proposed change would create substantial adverse impacts in the adjacent area or the City or County in general; and
- d. Whether the subject site is of adequate shape and size to accommodate the proposed change.

The scale and impact of these potential amendments to the Future Land Use Map calls for analysis beyond that of a typical plan amendment. Staff will create, collect, and compile information, policies, and other materials that will describe the potential impact of making these changes to the Future Land Use Map, and help determine if the proposed changes meet the criteria outlined above. Areas to be studied include urban design, transportation (motorized and non-motorized), infrastructure and services such as water/sewer capacity and schools, and the environment.

III. Public Engagement. Staff is planning two rounds of public meetings in each Compact Neighborhood (ten meetings total) to educate property owners and interested stakeholders and to gather input on proposed Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries. The first round of meetings, expected to take place in March or April, will focus on sharing information with attendees and engaging them in an exercise to draw a draft boundary for the Compact Neighborhood Tier. At the second round of meetings (expected June 2015), Staff will share results and answer questions about the boundaries that will be recommended to City Council the Board of County Commissioners. These boundaries will be based on the results of community meetings and input from staff from a variety of city and county departments.

This study is expected to result in changes to the Future Land Use Map. Thus, opportunities for public input will also be available through the standard public hearing process, which includes public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council and/or the Board of County Commissioners.

IV. Future Steps. Staff anticipates work outlined in this memo to take place over the next thirteen months. It is Staff's intention that plan amendments for each Compact Neighborhood Tier be carried through the process at the same time; however, we do recognize some areas may require additional time. Therefore, this timeline is subject to change. In general, the project can be broken into three phases:

- a. **Staff Background Work (3 months).** Staff will gather information, have initial meetings, and prepare for public engagement.
- b. **Public Engagement (5 months).** Staff will organize and hold two rounds of public meetings (described above) and prepare draft reports and recommendations.
- c. **Public Hearing and Adoption Process (6 months).** Presentations and public hearings to Joint City-County Planning Committee, Planning Commission, City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners.

V. Issues.

- a. **Privately Initiated Plan Amendment Applications.** Two privately initiated plan amendments for Leigh Village and Patterson Place were submitted to the Planning Department last fall. These private applications are still active; however, Staff has been in communication with the applicants regarding this comprehensive re-evaluation of all Compact Neighborhoods. Decisions to withdraw private applications were pending at the time this staff report was written.
- b. **Design District Update Text Amendment.** Staff is simultaneously working on updating Section 6.12 of the Unified Development Ordinance which provides the development standards for Design District zoning (Downtown Design and Compact Design). These are the zoning districts that would be compatible with a Compact Neighborhood/Design District designation on the Future Land Use Map. This update will clarify and improve many of the existing provisions, and will add new standards for the design of street cross sections. This text amendment is expected to be ready to begin the public hearing process in approximately one year.

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Attachments

Attachment 1, Station Area Planning Framework

Attachment 2, Compact Neighborhood Tier Study Area Overview

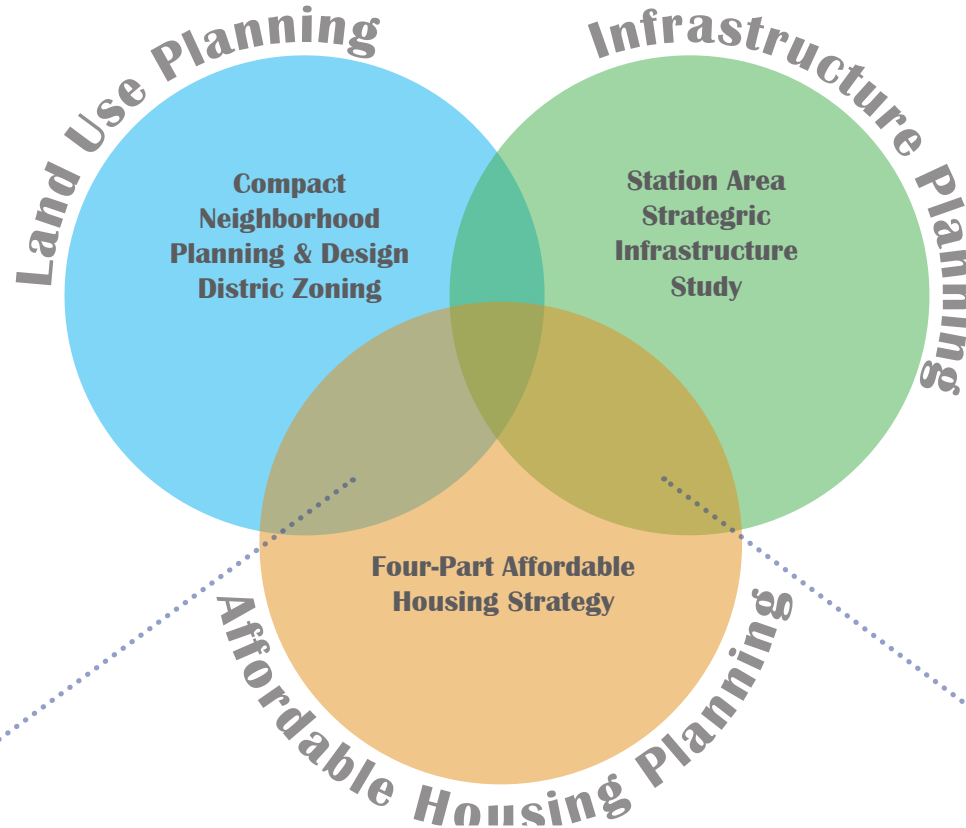
Station Area Planning Framework

Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit

As plans for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit become more defined, the Durham City-County Planning Department is coordinating several projects to address land use, infrastructure and housing around proposed stations. These projects fit under the umbrella of Station Area Planning, and while each has distinct objectives there are also significant areas of overlap.

LAND USE

Compact Neighborhood Tiers are a policy tool that support infill, redevelopment and new development at densities and designs that promote walkability and transit use. The Planning Department is in early stages of re-evaluating Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries established in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan to better align with the current Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit proposal. Establishing Compact Neighborhood Tiers are a first step toward implementing Design District zoning, which emphasizes the form of buildings and improvements to the public realm.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Planning for improvements to sidewalks, bike facilities, streetscapes and underground utilities within future transit areas will be crucial to the long-term success of these neighborhoods as places to live, work, and play. The Planning Department is coordinating a multi-departmental planning process, the Station Area Strategic Infrastructure (SASI) study, to identify and prioritize public infrastructure projects that will promote access to transit and enhance neighborhoods and businesses around regional rail stations.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The City and County Managers have authorized a four part strategy to encourage the development and/or retention of affordable housing in future rail station areas: (1) Develop a “toolbox” of financing options to fund affordable housing within transit areas; (2) Initiate amendments to the UDO that provide incentives for affordable housing through such measures as parking requirement reductions and improvements to the affordable housing density bonus; (3) Installation of Design Districts in future rail transit areas; and (4) Investigate the use of federal and state resources for affordable housing in future rail transit areas.

Implementing Design District zoning increases density allowing for more housing opportunities. Regulatory incentives will encourage affordable housing in these areas.

Providing infrastructure is a costly part of the development process. Publicly financed infrastructure could act as an incentive to build affordable housing.

